

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

RIO+20

OPENING PLENARY

Remarks by Trine Lise Sundnes, on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation

WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS MAJOR GROUP

Thank you, Chair.

Rio+20 is taking place at a critical time for working people: global crises multiply and intensify, people are losing faith in governments' capacity to listen to or defend their interests, and citizens see the future as lacking hope. The international community needs to show that it can deliver.

The United Nations "Earth Summit" in Rio 20 years ago was an historic and foundational moment to globally address development and environmental challenges. In a far less optimistic context, Rio+20 need to show that there is indeed hope to achieve global equity, that multilateralism has a role to play, that solidarity and cooperation between countries and their people is necessary and feasible.

Chair, a vision alone will not be enough. The international community must deliver concrete measures to put our societies on track to achieve social equity, decent work, environmental protection, development and prosperity, on track towards truly sustainable development.

Since its emergence, the trade union movement has provided workers and their families a voice, rights and a vision of a fair world.

However, the world in which we live and work has changed over the last twenty years. On one hand, the challenges have worsened. Precarious work is today the daily reality for a majority of people around the world; inequalities have grown to the point that people often do not acknowledge they are part of the same community; financial markets and lack of regulation have broken the relationship between companies and their responsibilities vis-à-vis workers, their families and the communities in which they operate; environmental challenges have become daunting, to the point that the very survival of communities is at risk.

On the other hand, our responses as trade unions have also evolved. The "Agenda 21" adopted at Rio in 1992 gave us the right to be recognised as actors in sustainability. And we have used that right wherever and whenever we have been given the opportunity to act and collectively organise.

Around the globe, we strengthened our work on social equity through the decent work agenda; we have also built bridges with environmental policies, promoting the greening of all sectors and promoting green and decent jobs in sectors that protect the environment, we have been clear in our commitment to emission reduction policies, we have brought new ideas to the table, such as the 'Just Transition' framework, or engaging on environmental actions through workplace, sectoral and national initiatives.

The world of work will have to face major transformations to achieve sustainability. These will not be easy for working people and we will depend on governments' action to develop the social policies to accompany them in the transition. But we want to be clear on this point: unless we act to promote environmental protection, to avoid climate change, to develop renewable energies, to clean production and supply chains, to promote sustainable forestry management, public transportation, energy efficiency, safe and clean chemicals, and many more environmentally-sound policies, our claims for social justice and equality will never be realised.

Global crisis need multilateral responses and global regulation. The labour movement will maintain its pressure to the world leaders. We need to move beyond rhetoric, if we want to avoid our current, dysfunctional economic model continue increasing inequalities and depleting natural resources.

The time for action is now. Our people and the planet depend on it.

Thank you.